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ABSTRACT

In a study of four begining teachers' understanding of curriculum decision-making, three questions were addressed: (1) How do beginning teachers understand district policies about curriculum decision making? (2) How can or should school districts provide guidance and leadership to incoming teachers? and (3) Do current induction policies consider beginning teachers' knowledge of curriculum decisions? Data were collected through focused interviews with four beginning elementary teachers and their principals from two different school districts. Also interviewed were the curriculum coordinator responsible for the reading programs within each district and the the reading coordinator for the state department of education. Findings indicated that there was occasional disagreement over decision making responsibility at all levels. Curriculum decision making was seen as moving further away from the classroom. Teachers and principals reported that their responsibilities in this area had diminished over the last few years, while district and state level responsibilities increased. Case studies are presented of the decision making process in the four schools and at the district and state levels. (JD)

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CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING AND THE BEGINNING TEACHER

Sharon F. O'Neal and James V. Hoffman

Report No. 9058

Gary A. Griffin, Program Director

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CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING

AND THE BEGINNING TEACHER

Introduction

Findings from research on beginning teachers, a predicted shortage of new teachers (especially in certain subject areas), and a national concern regarding the problems of newly certificated teachers raise a multitude of questions about how beginners make the transition to teaching.

With regard to previous research, an NIE-supported study of induction programs for beginning teachers (McDonald, Note 1) concluded with a recommendation that a research priority be placed upon the study of beginning teachers. McDonald and his colleagues are among many researchers and teacher educators who have considered the issues associated with the induction period of teaching (Ryan, 1970, 1974; Bolam, McMahon, Davis, & McCabbe, 1977; Tisher, 1978; Lortie, 1975). Such questions as, "Does generalized undergraduate training transfer to the specific school to which the new teacher has been assigned?", "Do first year teachers place their students at a disadvantage due to their inexperience?", and "Is the induction year the major cause for the attrition from the teaching profession during the first three years of teaching?" are a few of the questions addressed. In short, all agree that the transition from preservice teaching to inservice teaching is in need of greater research attention.

Secondly, the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that the demand for new teachers between 1986 and 1990 will exceed 190,000 per year (Feistritzer, 1983). Therefore, large numbers of new teachers will be entering schools during the next decade. Teacher training institutions as well as secondary and elementary schools must be prepared to provide these

new teachers with sound guidance if the profession is to maintain a quality workforce. In order to provide this quality guidance, we must know more about the problems encountered during the induction year of teaching as well as promising solutions.

Thirdly, it is the quality of that very workforce that is presently under close scrutiny. The National Commission of Excellence in Education (Gardner, 1983) stated that teachers today are not as well qualified as those trained in previous years. Such a statement implies that the way teachers are currently being trained is either inadequate or inappropriate. In an effort to deal with what many believe may be an inadequately trained or inappropriate workforce, state level policy makers have made decisions that impact the beginning teacher. As a result, many principals and first year teachers are already operating under state level mandates that are affecting their day-to-day work in schools. However, many questions exist regarding the value of these policies and mandates. In order to inform both policy and practice, a closer look at the first year of teaching is warranted.

Obviously, what to teach, when to teach it and for how long are all critical questions hat surround the new teacher. Therefore, one promising area for examining beginning teachers is curriculum decision making. Much work has been conducted in the area of teacher planning and decision making (e.g. Shavelson, 1976, Shavelson; Atwood & Borko, 1977; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Yinger, 1982; Zahorick, 1975). Results indicate that in order to understand the dimensions and complexities of curriculum decision making and practice it is necessary to describe the institutional context in which the teacher is operating (Goodlad & Associates, 1979).

This study examines the beginning teacher's interaction with the institutional context in making decisions related to the elementary school reading curriculum. (Reading curriculum was selected due to the heavy emphasis placed on this subject at the elementary level.) Who makes curricular decisions, how the new teacher becomes aware of these decisions, and the effect these decisions have on the new teacher are considered.

Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to describe four new teachers' understanding of curriculum decision-making related to the reading program in each of their districts. The methods and procedures used in this study will be defined and a summary of the results will be presented. A discussion section will follow in which three questions will be addressed: (1) How do beginning teachers understand district policies about curriculum decision making?; (2) How can/should school districts provide guidance and leadership to incoming teachers in the area of curriculum decision making?; and (3) Do current induction policies consider beginning teachers' knowledge of curriculum decisions?

Methods and Procedures

The research reported in this study is one piece of a major investigation of the induction of beginning teachers into their respective work places. Data collection on this portion of the project was conducted during the spring of 1983 by the Research In Teacher Education (RITE) program division of the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education (Griffin et al., Note 2). The overarching goal of the teacher induction study is to understand the transition from student of teaching to teacher.

Subjects

Four first year teachers from two different school districts participated in this portion of the teacher induction study. Each first year teacher was assigned to a different elementary school within his/her respective district. Administrators who participated included the following: the principal from each school (N=4); the curriculum coordinator responsible for reading programs within each district (N=2); and, the reading coordinator for the State Department of Education (N=1). A schematic for this design is presented in Figure 1. Two cooperating school districts provided a list of all first year teachers in their districts. The first year teachers were chosen at random from this list. The first four teachers and their respective principals contacted agreed to participate in this study.

Procedures

Data for this study were collected through focused interviews with first year teachers and administrators serving in various roles at local, district and statewide levels. Interviews consisted of open-ended questions followed by a structured Q-sort task proposed by Roser (1974) and modified by Hoffman (1979). Each participant was asked to read through fourteen critical reading program decisions (Figure 2) printed on 3X5 index cards. Participants were asked to rate each decision according to its impact on the reading program, to determine at what level of responsibility that decision was made, and to state their degree of satisfaction with current policy regarding that decision. School principals were then asked to rate the first year teacher participating in this study on a 1 to 5 scale; 1 being an "ineffective" teacher and 5 being a "very effective" teacher.

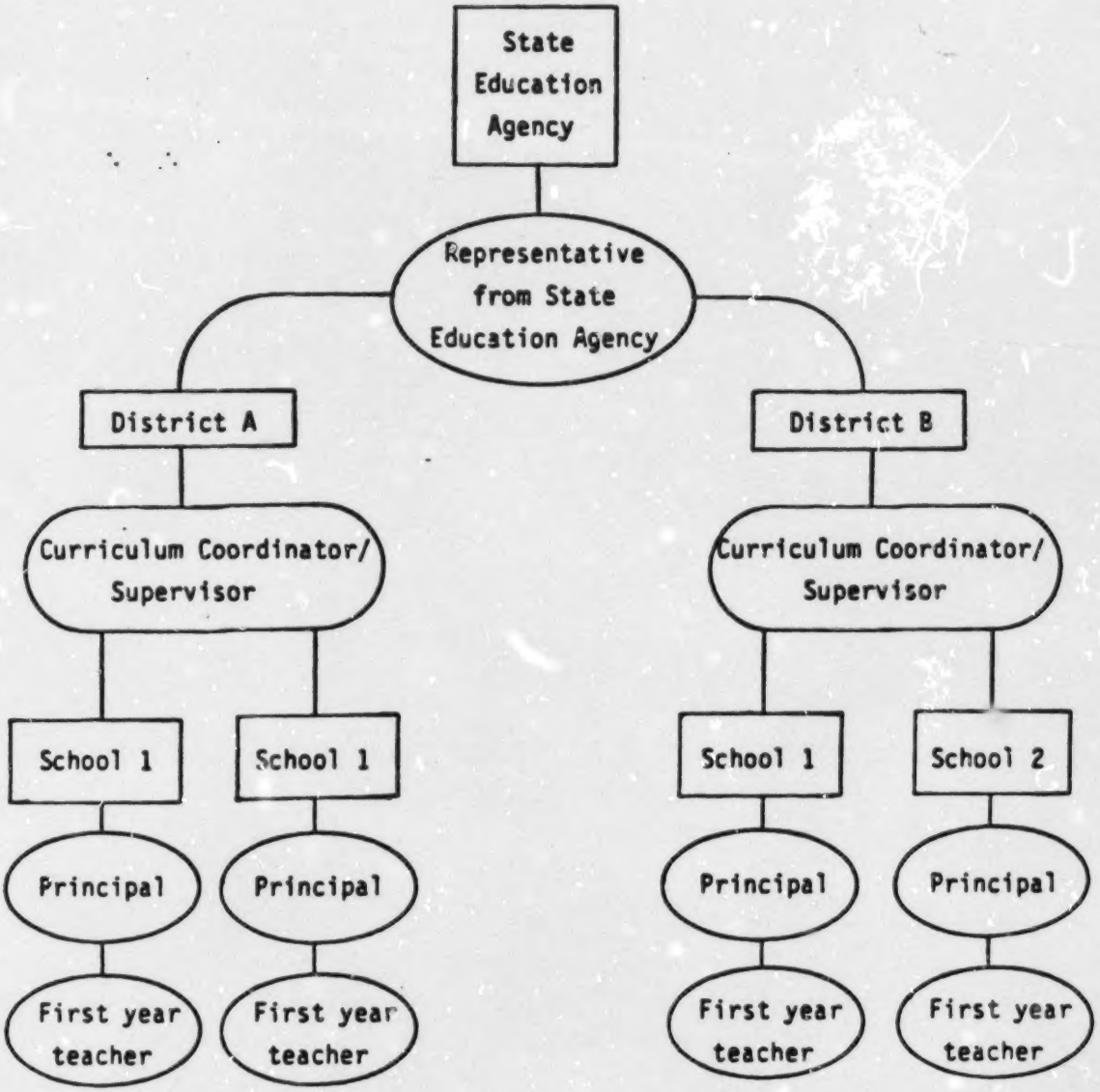
State Education Agency
Representative from State Education Agency
District A
District B
Curriculum Coordinator/ Supervisor
Curriculum Coordinator/ Supervisor
School 1
School 1
School 1
School 2
Principal
Principal
Principal
Principal
First year teacher
First year teacher
First year teacher
First year teacher

Figure 1.

Reading Program Decisions

1. Who decides which philosophy of reading instruction will be followed in the program?
2. Who decides how much money will be allocated for materials and other resources to support reading instruction?
3. Who decides which instructional materials and other resources will be procured for use in the reading program?
4. Who decides how much time per week will be allocated to reading instruction?
5. Who decides how students will be placed in homerooms at the beginning of the year?
6. Who decides how students will be placed in instructional groups?
7. Who decides how time will be allocated to students/groups during the reading period?
8. Who decides which of the available materials and approaches will be used with which groups of students?
9. Who decides which lessons/skills will be taught to specific students and when?
10. Who decides which standardized tests are given and when?
11. Who decides which informal tests are given and when?
12. Who decides on the kind of information to be communicated to parents about their child's progress in reading?
13. Who decides on the specific information about a given student's progress in reading that is to be communicated to parents?
14. Who decides how well a teacher is executing his/her responsibilities in the reading program?

Figure 2.

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The State Education Agency also exerted considerable influence over local districts through a statewide textbook adoption policy. Instructional materials (textbooks in particular) were provided free of charge to districts by the state based on pupil enrollment. Although the state did not mandate the use of basal readers, five series were always adopted by the state. Districts had the prerogative of selecting their reading materials from any one or a combination of the approved series. Such a system thus insured the predominant use of the basal approach to reading.

Jordan School District

Jordan School District is located in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area in the south central United States. The district is made up of eight elementary schools with a pupil enrollment of over 5,000 in grades K through 6.

The informant for district level policies related to the reading program was the curriculum coordinator, Ms. MacKay. Basic program decisions within this district related to the area of time allocations, philosophy of instruction (the basal phonics) and student evaluation policies were made at the district level. Within these curriculum constraints the individual campuses were left to devise instruction (with expectations for flexibility in response to pupil needs) and organize pupils for learning in the manner that best suits them. The curriculum coordinator seemed basically satisfied with current levels of performance in the area of reading and with the division of decision-making responsibilities (increasingly centralized) as it had come to be articulated through the new superintendent.

This method allowed the informant to describe how decisions are made, thus providing more information than is usually obtained from a traditional interview. Audiotapes and field notes from these interviews were subjected to a qualitative analysis with the purpose of identifying curricular decision making patterns. The analysis resulted in a series of four case studies. These case studies were subsequently analyzed for dominant or recurring themes among first year teachers as they interacted with contextual factors.

Findings

The following section will contain summaries of data collected at the state, the district and the school level.

State Level

The informant at the state level, Ms. Dearborne*, served as the curriculum coordinator for reading with the State Education Agency. She explained that the primary responsibility for the State Education Agency relative to reading instruction, had been with respect to program accreditation. Recently however, the State Legislature asked the State Education Agency to develop and implement a statewide basic skills assessment program and develop a grade by grade curriculum for all schools in all subject areas. The assessment program is currently in place and operational. The curriculum is in the final stages of development. In the future, local districts will need to take into consideration these curriculum guidelines when formulating their plans.

*Names of participants and sites have been changed to protect anonymity.

Wood Elementary School

Principal. Wood Elementary School in Jordan School District had an enrollment of 630 students. The principal, Mr. Hicks, described the reading program as the "Scott Foresman Program."

Mr. Wood located significant decision-making responsibilities within the reading program at the school level (see Figure 3). Quantitative decisions (e.g., distribution of students, amount of money made available, time allotments) were his responsibility while qualitative decisions (e.g. materials to be procured, lessons to be taught, assignment of students to groups) were teacher level decisions. All "teachers as a group" decisions were assigned with reference to grade level groups. No "group decisions" crossed grade level boundaries. While the principal was accepting (or at least tolerating) of grass roots innovation, there was no evidence that he actually encouraged specific efforts or initiated any of his own. Mr. Wood was aware of the problems of first year teachers but seemed to be of a mind that it was something that everyone had to go through and no amount of additional time in preparation would help the situation. "The best we can do is listen to concerns and offer support and consultation when it is requested."

First year teacher. Ms. Bartell, the first year teacher at Wood school was assigned to the kindergarten level The comments of this first year teacher were basically consistent with those of her principal (Figure 3) in terms of characterizing the decision-making structure of the school. However, there was a slight tendency for the principal to assign decisions to teachers as a group which the first year teachers felt were individual teacher decisions. Basic differences existed between the philosophy, the

Jordan School District

Wood Elementary School

Levels of Decision Making

	State Official	Superintendent	Curriculum Coordinator	Principal	Teachers - Group	Teachers - Individual	Other
Decision # 1					P.W., T.W.		
2				P.W., T.W.			
3		T.W.			P.W.		
4	P.W., T.W.						
5				P.W., T.W.			
6					P.W.	T.W.	
7					P.W.	T.W.	
8						P.W., T.W.	
9						P.W., T.W.	
10		T.W.	P.W.				
11					P.W.	T.W.	
12			T.W.	P.W.			
13					T.W.	P.W.	
14				P.W., T.W.			

P.W. Principal, Wood Elementary
T.W. First year teacher, Wood Elementary

Figure 3.

content, and organization of the reading program at the kindergarten versus first grade levels. This teacher was to move to first grade level the following school year and was somewhat apprehensive. She seemed aware that this move would limit her freedom within the curriculum in terms of acting on her own philosophy (i.e., basal versus language experience emphasis). The apprehensiveness was clearly related to values and beliefs, not a fear of being able to perform the tasks as required. Ms. Bartell had become aware of policy and decision making responsibilities by informal means through (1) her student teaching experience; (2) her team teacher; and (3) her contacts with teachers of her own children.

Orchard Elementary School

Principal. Orchard Elementary School in Jordan School District had an enrollment of 361 students. Our interview with the principal of Orchard Elementary, Mr. Evans, was conducted in his office. His initial description of the reading program in the school was limited to the identification of the Basal Series (Scott Foresman) in use.

Mr. Evans seemed to be very aware of the hierarchial structure of schooling and decision making. The decisions made above his level seem to constrain or limit those assigned below him. He described the need for higher level decision making in the system in terms of a "stabilizing" force. He acknowledged his own dissatisfaction with some of the decisions made at higher levels and mused at one point in discussing philosophy. "We do have to have one...whether it should come from that level...we do need direction...we could come up with it ourselves. We need to rely more on those in the trenches."

This appears to be an empty wish when followed by the statement that "...it is always easier to accept someone else's things (decisions) and run

with it...whether that's the right way to do it...that's always questionable...but for the most part it works fairly well." It seemed that the further decisions were removed from this principal the more comfortable (or at least relieved from responsibility) he felt. Overall it was clear that this principal viewed his role in the reading program as seeing to it that policies made at higher levels were carried out and when there were/are no clear policies, passing on the responsibility to others. Mr. Evans assignment of decision making responsibility is summarized in Figure 4.

First year teacher. Ms. Wallace, the first year teacher in Orchard School, had been hired mid-year just as she completed her student teaching experience in the same school. Initially she described the reading program in her classroom as Scott Foresman "...mainly we just go by the basal."

Ms. Wallace's responses were generally consistent with those of her principal in locating decision making responsibility (Figure 4). The principal seemed to play a minor role in the program overall. He was mentioned only once in our discussion and that was with reference to the evaluation of teachers. While some major decisions were made at the district level there was a great deal of individual and group (grade level) decision making. Even more than in the case of Wood Elementary, the principal at Orchard seemed to believe that there was more group level decision making going on (Decisions #'s 7, 8, 9, & 12 in particular) than did this first year teacher. This teacher and her principal often made reference to the term "academic freedom" in describing decision making. The student teaching experience in this school plus her undergraduate reading concentration program obviously weighed heavily on this first year teacher's

Jordan School District

Orchard Elementary School

Levels of Decision Making

	State Official	Superintendent	Curriculum Coordinator	Principal	Teachers - Group	Teachers - Individual	Other
Decision # 1	P.O.		T.O.				
2		P.O.		T.O.			
3			P.O., T.O.				
4		T.O.			P.O.		
5					P.O., T.O.		
6					P.O., T.O.		
7					P.O.	T.O.	
8					P.O.	T.O.	
9					P.O.	T.O.	
10			P.O., T.O.				
11						P.O., T.O.	
12					P.O.	T.O.	
13						P.O., T.O.	
14				P.O., T.O.			

P.O. Principal, Orchard Elementary
T.O. First year teacher, Orchard Elementary

Figure 4.

experience. Both were positively regarded as making her first year a successful one.

Robins School District

Robins School District is located approximately 100 miles north of Jordan School District. It is situated in a small and rapidly growing suburban area 15 miles away from the state capitol. There are 11 elementary schools in the district with a total enrollment of over 7000 pupils.

The informant for the district level was Ms. Hood, the curriculum coordinator for the reading/language arts program. She was just completing her first year with the district in this position although she had prior supervisory experience in another district. Ms. Hood described the reading program initially in terms of a skills continuum which served as the central focal point of activity. Ms. Hood located two decisions as being her major responsibility; who decides the philosophy of reading instruction and who decides which standardized tests are given. She viewed the philosophy decision as the most critical to the success of the reading program.

Ms. Hood located only one decision as being the responsibility of the Commissioner of Education. This decision dealt with the amount of time allocated per week to reading instruction. Although she felt this decision might be of great importance in other districts, she viewed it as having little effect in her district as they were already allocating more time for reading instruction than the commissioner had called for.

With regard to the principal, three decisions were noted as being his/her primary responsibility: the amount of money allocated for materials and resources; the assigning of students to homerooms at the beginning of the year; and, the evaluation of teachers. Ms. Hood viewed each of these as critical to the reading program.

Teachers as a group were awarded only one primary decision by Ms. Hood; that of deciding how students were placed in instructional groups. Teachers as individuals however were viewed as making six of the specific decisions. These decisions dealt with (1) what specific information is communicated to parents, (2) which informal tests were given and when, (3) what lessons/skills are taught to specific students, (4) which materials and approaches are used with which students, (5) time allocated to students/groups during reading, and (6) which materials and resources will be procured for use in the reading program. Again, she viewed each of this as being very important to the success of the reading program.

Ms. Hood allocated only one decision to the superintendent of schools. This decision dealt with the kind of information communicated to parents. Again, she viewed this decision as important to the success of the reading program.

Ms. Hood felt very satisfied with the way in which these decisions were presently being carried out in her district. In addition, she felt competent in making the decisions she had allocated to her role.

Allen Elementary School

Principal. Allen Elementary School in Robins School District has an enrollment of over 600 students. The principal of the school, Ms. Peterson, has served in that capacity since the school was opened five year ago. The reading program was described in broad terms to include not just reading but the full range of language arts activities.

It was clear from the interview responses that Ms. Peterson plays an active role in the instructional decision making. The principal was active in shaping the philosophical orientation of the school through the introduction of many new programs. In locating so few decisions at the

district level she obviously felt unencumbered and able to shape the school program. The systematized teacher evaluation plan she had adopted on her own was revealing of her stress in this area. The pattern of decision making below the principal level reflected her interest in group decision making and team work. Ms. Peterson's assignment of decision making responsibilities is summarized in Figure 5.

First year teacher. Ms. Sinclair, the first year teacher in Allen Elementary School, was teaching in a third grade class. She described her reading program in terms of the Houghton-Mifflin Reading Series.

Ms. Sinclair's representation of the decision making structure in the school was markedly different from that given by her principal (Figure 5). Her classifications suggested that she perceived herself as having a great amount of flexibility/latitude in making policy. As with the other schools, the principal's perceptions of "group" decision making were not consistent with the first year teacher's views of individual responsibility. Ms. Sinclair's comments indicated that she was in the process of building a program that would work for her and that was compatible with her grade level team, rather than trying to discover what the intended program was all about. When she did look for the intended program she looked at the basal manual. She was the lowest rated of the four teachers studied.

Fillmore Elementary School

Principal. Fillmore Elementary School in Robins School District has an enrollment of 500 students. The principal of the school, Ms. Hoover, described the school's reading program in terms of the Houghton-Mifflin Basal Series.

Robins School District

Allen Elementary School

Levels of Decision Making

	State Official	Superintendent	Curriculum Coordinator	Principal	Teachers - Group	Teachers - Individual	Other
Decision # 1				P.A.		T.A.	
2				P.A.	T.A.		
3				P.A., T.A.			
4	T.A.				P.A.		
5				P.A., T.A.			
6					P.A.	T.A.	
7					P.A.	T.A.	
8					P.A.	T.A.	
9						P.A., T.A.	
10			P.A., T.A.				
11						P.A., T.A.	
12					P.A.	T.A.	
13						P.A., T.A.	
14				P.A., T.A.			

P.A. Principal, Allen Elementary
T.A. First year teacher, Allen Element

Figure 5.

Ms. Peterson appeared to play a limited role in instructional decision making in the school. Most of the broad constraining decisions she perceived as policy decisions made at the district level. Most of the teacher group decisions were made on a once yearly basis as a way of organizing for instruction. There seemed to be a great deal of responsibility placed on teachers as to the day to day decision making in the classroom. It was not clear how carefully the district level policies were monitored (and thereby constraining) on individual classrooms. Ms. Hoover's assignments of decision making responsibility are summarized in Figure 6.

First year teacher. Ms. Brown, the first year teacher in Fillmore Elementary, was teaching in a fifth grade class. She described the reading program chiefly in terms of the Houghton-Mifflin Basal reading program.

The profile of decision making described by this teacher was compatible with that of her principal (Figure 6). While there was congruence in the assignment of responsibility, there appeared to be a greater spread of decision making across levels in this school than in any other. Most of the overriding (constraining) decisions were made above the school level. Most of the day-to-day decisions were left to her as a classroom teacher. One senses in her description considerable frustration and disillusionment with teaching. Her dissatisfaction with her own performance however was soothed by the fact that many of the important decisions were the system's responsibility, thus reducing her personal responsibility. Ms. Brown was rated the highest of the four studied. She was the only one rated as a very effective teacher by her principal.

Robins School District

Fillmore Elementary School

Levels of Decision Making

	State Official	Superintendent	Curriculum Coordinator	Principal	Teachers - Group	Teachers - Individual	Other
Decision # 1		P.F.	T.F.				
2		P.F., T.F.					
3			P.F., T.F.				
4		T.F.			P.F.		
5				P.F., T.F.			
6					P.F., T.F.		
7					P.F.	T.F.	
8			T.F.		P.F.		
9			T.F.			P.F.	
10			P.F., T.F.				
11						P.F., T.F.	
12			P.F.	T.F.			
13						P.F., T.F.	
14			T.F.	P.F.			

P.F. Principal, Filimore Elementary
T.F. First year teacher, Fillmore Elementary

Figure 6.

Summary of Findings

Teachers in this study operated under a heavily layered and hierarchically organized set of decision making constraints. Personnel at the state, district, and school level at times disagreed as to how this hierarchy of decision making was organized. Even within the same school, principals and teachers occasionally disagreed over decision making responsibility.

No decisions were consistently located at the state level, however, the information from the state level suggested a trend toward the state becoming more active in curriculum decision making. The areas of state involvement impinged most directly on the kinds of decisions found at district levels in this study. All reading programs were defined as the adopted basal reading program. Because the state selected the five basal reader series from which each district selected their reading materials, state control was evident here as well. In addition all teachers used the basal manual as their primary source for guiding decision making.

At the school level, only one principal was found taking an active role in curriculum decision making. This principal influenced decisions about the philosophy of the reading program as well as many of the day-to-day curriculum decisions that groups of teachers at a given grade level had responsibility for. As a result she was viewed as an instructional leader by the beginning teacher.

Also at the school level, teachers reported frequent interactions with others at their same grade level and/or with their previous cooperating teachers. (Three of the four beginning teachers had their student teaching experiences in the schools in which they were presently assigned.) These

interactions were viewed by the new teachers as invaluable in terms of helping them through their induction year. Although such informal networking often took place with teachers at the same grade level, new teachers reported never interacting with those at other grade levels. In addition teachers and principals reported that few, if any, curriculum-type interactions took place across grade levels. (For a summary of data, see Figure 7.)

Conclusions

Four conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First there was some evidence of disagreement among teachers, principals, district level administrators and/or state level administrators over curriculum decision responsibilities. This may be disruptive to the work of the new teacher. If one views schools as comprised of a set of interrelated components (Goodlad, 1975; or Miles & Schmuck, 1971) such confusion may lead to dysfunction in the workplace.

Goodlad's schema for curriculum decision making (i.e., decisions made at societal, institutional and instructional levels) coupled with the logical notion that these levels should not overlap provide a sound way of examining curriculum decisions. For example a decision made at an instructional level, perhaps by a classroom teacher in response to pupil needs, should not be in conflict with a decision made at a societal level by, for example, a state board of education. If one decision is shared at two levels, confusion may result. In our study, for example, such confusion surfaced when a beginning teacher (Ms. Brown) chose to use her own reading materials with a group of students who found the materials provided by the school too difficult. Because certain curriculum coverage was required by the district, the teacher was asked to move back into the more difficult materials.

Levels of Decision Making

	State	District		School Based			
	State Official	Superintendent	Curriculum Coordinator	Principal	Teachers - Group	Teachers - Individual	Other
Decision # 1	P.O.	P.F.	T.O., T.F.	P.A.	P.W., T.W.	T.A.	
2		P.O. P.F., T.F.		P.A. P.W., T.W.	T.O., T.A.		
3		T.W.	P.O., T.O., P.F., T.F.	P.A., T.A.	P.W.		
4	P.A., T.W., T.A.	T.O., T.F.			P.F. P.O., P.A.		
5				PW, PA, PF TW, TA, TF	P.O., T.O		
6					PO, PW, PA PF, TO, TF	T.W., T.A.	
7					PO, PW, PA PF	TO, TW, TA, TF	
8			T.F.		PO, PA, PF	PW, TO, TW, TA	
9			T.F.		P.O.	PW, PA, PF TO, TW, TA	
10		T.W.	PO, PW, PA, PF, TO, TA, TF				
11					P.A.	PO, PA, PF, TO, TW, TA, TF	
12			P.F., T.W.	P.W., T.F.	P.O., P.A.	T.O., T.A.	
13					T.W.	PO, PW, PA, PF TO, TA, TF	
14			T.F.	PO, PW, PA, PF TO, TW, TA			

Robbins School District
- TF = First year teacher, Fillmore
- PF = Principal, Fillmore
- TA = First year teacher, Allen
- PA = Principal, Allen

Jordan School District
- TO = First year teacher, Orchard
- PO = Principal, Orchard
- TW = First year teacher, Wood
- PW = Principal, Wood

Figure 7.

Questions remain therefore about the appropriateness of certain curriculum decisions which are removed from the actual classroom, as well as about the beginning teacher's induction into a system which does not inform him/her of his/her curricular prerogatives.

Second, curriculum decision making was seen as moving further away from the classroom. Teachers and principals reported that their responsibilities regarding curriculum decision making had diminished over the last few years, while district and state level responsibilities had increased. State and district level participants agreed. In light of this finding, questions are therefore raised about teacher training. Institutions of higher education train teachers to be knowledgeable with regard to curriculum in order to make reasoned decisions. Is such training necessary for teachers in schools where curriculum decisions are perceived to be made elsewhere? For example, the basal reader played a tremendous role in reading instruction in this study. The manuals and materials were more than resources to new teachers. They served as explicit guides to new teachers as they made day-to-day instructional decisions. All new teachers in this sample reported extensive training in the area of reading methods, yet, new teachers allowed most decisions regarding reading instruction to be dictated by the based reader teachers' manual. If schools are eliminating the need for teachers to make decisions in the area of reading instruction, questions are raised regarding teacher training. For example, do we, as teacher educators provide our students with alternatives to "traditional" instruction even if those alternatives would be impossible to carry out as a result of state, district, or school imposed restraints? Should teacher educators prepare students to be "technicians" or thoughtful decision-makers?

Third, only one of the four principals in this study was active in instructional decision making at the school level. Because principals are responsible for making decisions at an institutional level, they must be constantly informed about the instructional decisions made by teachers and/or groups of teachers at their schools. Otherwise curriculum decisions might be made at the institutional level that could negatively impact curriculum decisions made by teachers that take into account classroom context.

Fourth, the press (in this restricted sample) was toward interactions and subsequently standardization of a program within a grade level, not continuity across grade levels. For beginning teachers, the interactions within each grade level served as a support system which had helped to ease their transition into their induction year. (Three of the four had their previous cooperating teachers serving on these grade level teams.) Each beginning teacher stated that such support had been critical to their emotional "survival" during the school year.

No interactions were reported <u>across</u> grade levels. Questions then arise regarding how the new teacher perceives curriculum and instruction. Are new teachers aware of vertical articulation of programs?

Implications

Due to the small number of participants in this study, suggestions and implications are cautiously drawn. Only findings which emerged from all beginning teachers, with information verified from a variety of participant roles, will be used to suggest implications for present practice and future research.

curriculum responsibilities could ease the new teacher's transition into the workplace.

Finally, information about curriculum responsibilities could be provided through interactions with colleagues across grade levels. Beginning teachers in this study reported little or no interaction with teachers at other grade levels. Beginning teachers may therefore be making decisions in their classrooms with little or no regard for articulation of the curriculum across grade levels.

Research

With regard to this study's contribution to our current knowledge base about new teachers, much of the information found here was encouraging in some ways yet disheartening in other ways. For example, the finding that all participants perceived decision making as being further removed from the hands of the new teacher may be a seductive notion. As we each recall our first year of teaching and/or those of others, such distancing of decision making seems to be a good idea. It protects students from a novice who may not always make the wisest choices with regard to curriculum and instruction. On the other hand, such distancing of decision making would also apply to those teachers who are more than capable of making such decisions, and who are most informed about the unique context of their own classroom. Coupled with this finding was the finding that new teachers are wed to their teaching manuals as they go about the business of teaching reading. Although this methodical use of the manual insures a certain amount of curriculum coverage for all children, it may deny others of more appropriate instruction. Although all new teachers reported extra training in reading methods, all used the teacher's basal reader manual as an explicit guide when making day-to-day instructional decisions. Such in

Practice

With regard to practice, this study contributes to our present understanding of beginning teachers by examining their understanding of curriculum decision making within societal, institutional and instructional contexts. Many states are currently monitoring beginning teacher performance (Defino & Hoffman, Note 6). Some of these programs have as their objective the assessment of beginning teachers' skills in the classroom, while others are attempting to assist new teachers as they move through their induction year. Three findings from this study could inform either of these induction-type programs. First, all of the beginning teachers in this study reported that their relationship with other more experienced teachers at their same grade level was most helpful during their induction year. Such relationships served as a source of support as well as a source of information.

Many induction programs currently in place (e.g., Florida and Oklahoma) provide new teachers with an experienced colleague both to assist and to assess the new teachers. Data from this study indicate that such interactions are perceived as critical to the beginning teacher, especially if the experienced colleague is working at the same grade level and/or is someone the beginning teacher has worked closely with before. Programs, therefore, which focus on beginning teachers might consider providing a support person at the grade level at which the beginning teacher is assigned. Such support personnel may provide information to the new teacher that the district has overlooked.

Secondly, many beginning teachers in this study did not share some of their principals or supervisors perceptions of decision making responsibilities. Therefore, beginning teacher programs which focused on

depth training in one curriculum area (i.e., reading) may be more appropriate at an inservice level when teachers have learned to manage instruction and can focus more of their energies on their impact on students (Fuller; 1969). Breadth in various methods training at the preservice level and depth at the inservice level might better guide teacher training.

In sum, more research is needed to determine if new teachers, who are formally inducted into a program, are more knowledgeable with regard to the organization and hierarchy of curricular decision making than those who are inducted irto the workplace informally.

Zeichner (Note 4) has called in particular for studies of beginning teachers that examine institutional encouragements and constraints presented to new teachers by both persons (e.g. pupils, colleagues, principals) and institutional structures (e.g. the form of the curriculum, the ecology of the classroom). This study has served as a beginning to answer questions concerned with institutional constraints and teachers' curriculum decision making in reading.

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